

New Rukh: better than two old ones?

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The process of active reshuffles and re-arrangement of political forces and alliances for the early election season has already produced some new characters and trends. Among the general calls for consolidation of pro-democracy political forces at the center-right part of the national political spectrum, a group "For the Unity of Rukh" held its foundation congress on November 25, 2000 in Kyiv.

The congress was reportedly attended by almost 600 delegates, representatives of different Rukh organizations from all over Ukraine. According to a political legend, the new formation was initiated by "grass-root organizations of Udovenko's and Kostenko's parties" (Ukraina Moloda, November 28, 2000). The key slogan that served as a constituent basis for the new entity and was reflected in the congress participant's formal address to potential voters was the argument that "the Rukh was not split up into two parts, but far deeper, at least into three [parts]. The third part [consists of] organizations and individual Rukh members who did not join any official Rukh structure, do not recognize the split-up and demand restoration of unity" (Chas, December 1, 2000).

The recent congress definitely favored the People's Rukh of Ukraine (NRU-Udovenko), while Yuri Kostenko's party, the Ukrainian People's Rukh (UNR), was scarcely mentioned in the debates - which looked strange, given the fact that "according to NRU spokesman Dmytro Ponomarchuk, he estimated that about 70 percent of members of Kostenko's organization were present at the congress" (Den, November 28, 2000). However, the claim was later refuted by Yuri Kostenko himself: "only one organization, [of] Ternopil, where Bohdan Boiko used to work as the governor, was represented by a substantial number [of members], in particular, the Husyatyn district organization of the UNR" (Ukraina Moloda, November 30, 2000). Kostenko also added that "according to preliminary information, representatives of the above organizations said they had been misled. They thought they were going to attend a unification congress, but not the congress of yet another political party. That is why they stay in the UNR" (Ukraina Moloda, November 30, 2000). Hence, the congress immediately provoked a number of questions about membership criteria in the party of the "non-aligned". The new formation was reportedly organized to pursue the noble goal of "restoring the single Rukh organization" (Den, November 28, 2000). However, it is unclear how well and if at all the consolidation process can be helped by the establishment of yet another political organization that also claims the right to be titled "Rukh".

In order to pursue the declared purpose, the assembly resolved to establish a new political party. As any political party, the new formation, called "For Unity of the Rukh!" there is a leader. In this case, rather symbolically, the new entity has three heads: member of the NRU parliamentary faction Bohdan Boiko, non-faction MP Georgy Filipchuk and member of the NRU Eduard Krech. It looks like co-chairmen of the new "Rukh" intend to lead the two "old Rukhs to unification with the help of some "strong hand" methods. Speaking to the congress about the attitudes of the leaders of the NRU and the UNR, Bohdan Boiko argued: "I know those people very well. Unless there is pressure and threats, they will not think about unification but about the top of the party's [election] list" (Silski Visti, November 28, 2000). It is hard to guess what exactly is meant by the reference to "pressure and threats" and how they are going to be included in the party-building process and inter-party relations. According to Boiko, "when the real unification takes place, the organization [i.e., the new "Rukh"] will be self-dissolved" (Silski Visti, November 28, 2000). Yet, judging from the picture presented by Mr. Boiko, the act of "self-dissolution" will not occur in the near future. According to Boiko, "within a year he had conducted negotiations about the unification with leaders of both Rukhs, but those did not produce any results" (Den, November 28, 2000). Naturally, there is no guarantee that the ice of the split-up will be melted by the second year of negotiations and that the situation will not become worse instead.

The initiators of the new "Rukh" have chosen the paradoxical way "from the opposite", seeking to act either as mediators of the unification process or facilitators of the debates on the issue. In order to unify two closely related political parties formed as a result of the break-up of one entity, a new party is established to claim the role of a self-styled intermediary and a driving force at a time. A summary document of the "third Rukh's" congress stipulates: "at this congress we want to work out common grounds on which one could unite both all Rukh members and our voters <...> to develop mechanisms of real unification, its specific terms, to offer the conditions for unification that would suit all" (Chas, December 1, 2000).

However, the general role of an intermediary - a mediator, lacking political charisma who claims to seek facilitating contacts between the parties to the conflict by means of establishing a new political

party with its own goals, interests and motivations - looks rather unnatural. The commitment to self-sacrifice, voiced through the declarations at the congress that "we want to have the single party list, [to see] Rukh identify its allies" (Den, November 28, 2000) does not look convincing but rather resembles "velvet" coercion.

The speeches made at the congress disclosed a priority strategic goal of the new group: taking part in the 2002 parliamentary election. "The dramatically negative result of the split-up was the critical reduction of the number of Ukrainian voters prepared to vote for the broken-up Rukh organizations at the next election," the address stressed. The situation "will mean the threat of losing the representation in the Verkhovna Rada by the national democratic forces in general, which is extremely dangerous for Ukraine's state security" (Den, November 28, 2000). Hence, according to Boiko, "voters of Ukraine will not bear three Rukhs" - the conclusion sounds logical indeed! Other claims, though, are just on the surface of the logic: "if the Rukhs will be unable to unite, they have to leave the political arena" (Den, November 28, 2000). The conclusion sounds radical, given the common sense argument: if the consolidation does not take place, the Rukh - no matter one or several of them - will be made to leave the "political arena" by Ukrainian voters regardless of the parties' leaderships' wishes.

Analyzing chances and prospects of the new "Rukh", it is worth taking a closer look at the profile of its leader, Bohdan Boiko, seen by some representatives of the Ukrainian right and center- right as rather equivocal, particularly in the light of the NRU Central Board's proposal to nominate Boiko as Rukh's candidate for the presidency in 1998, treated rather negatively by representatives of other national democratic forces. Referring to the idea, leader of the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists (CUN) Slava Stetsko said: "It is hard to comment on the Rukh's actions nowadays..." (Segodnya, September 9, 1998).

Public cooperation between UNR leader Yuri Kostenko and Bohdan Boiko is a special case that derives from the Rukh history before the break-up. The issue of nominating the party's candidate to run for presidency in October 1999 causes major controversy and confrontation within the party, with Yuri Kostenko and Bohdan Boiko being among the main characters of the political performance. In early September 1998 the session of the Central Board of the Rukh selected a candidate to run for presidency to be proposed for approval by the congress and to be agreed on by other national democratic forces. According to scarce media reports, the situation developed as follows: "First, the nominations were Vyacheslav Maksymovych [Chornovil] himself and ex-minister of the environment Yuri Kostenko. Unexpected for many was the number of votes cast for Yuri Kostenko - 32. 18 voted for Vyacheslav Chornovil... In order to "prevent the split-up in the party", Yuri Kostenko withdrew his candidacy from the debate. Suddenly, ex-head of the Ternopil regional state administration Bohdan Boiko nominates himself for the President's "headset" and received three fourth of the votes of the Central Board member" (Vechirniy Kyiv, September 9, 1998). Commenting on the reasons for withdrawing his candidacy, Yuri Kostenko argued: "the reason was absolutely different: [it was] the situation that developed in the party. <...> [I] shall only say that Rukh must be reformed in order to remain the leader of the national democratic forces" (Den, September 10, 1998). The dispute was supposed to be resolved by the All-Ukrainian Congress of the NRU scheduled to take place on December 12, 1998. Shortly before the congress regional organizations nominated their candidates to be endorsed by the party as its choice for running for presidency. Former governor of the Ternopil region and head of the party's Secretariat Bohdan Boiko was among the favorites of the nomination process, but chose to step down in favor of the Chornovil-Kostenko option. Former Foreign Minister Hennady Udovenko and former Minister of the Environment Yuri Kostenko had practically equal chances to be chosen as the Rukh's nominees; therefore, participants of the congress split into "supporters of Udovenko" and "supporters of Kostenko". Yuri Kostenko was not lucky that time: the party leadership approved Hennady Udovenko and Vyacheslav Chornovil as its candidates for presidency. A few days later the Central Board of the Rukh issued a resolution stipulating: "... taking into account the statement of one of the pretenders for the candidacy for the position of the President, identified by the first stage of the IX All-Ukrainian Assembly of the People's Rukh of Ukraine, Vyacheslav Chornovil, about the withdrawal of his candidacy at the second stage of the IX All- Ukrainian Assembly of the Rukh, and taking into account the written commitment of Hennady Udovenko, all NRU organizations [are ordered to] begin active propaganda of the candidacy of Hennady Udovenko as the single pretender for candidacy for the President from the People's Rukh of Ukraine" (Chas, January 22-29 , 1999).

However, the entire complex of events, ambitions, objectives and motives culminated in an open conflict. On February 19, 1999, the majority of the Rukh's parliamentary faction denied confidence to Vyacheslav Chornovil and elected Yuri Kostenko as its new leader. Vyacheslav Chornovil did not agree to the decision, and the faction split into two parts. Relatively well-known and influential MPs who followed Kostenko included Dmytro Pavlychko, Vitaly Shevchenko, Ivan Drach, Vyacheslav Kyrylenko, Ivan Zayets, and Oleksandr Lavrynovych. Hennady Udovenko, Lilia Hryhorovych,

Mykhailo Kosiv, Vyacheslav Koval, Les Taniuk chose to support Chornovil. The situation further deteriorated after Chornovil's tragic death shortly afterwards, when the former co-thinkers found themselves confronting each other. On April 2 Hennady Udovenko added to the confrontation by publicly stating that the two organizations would continue to cooperate and do everything to bring the "stray sheep" back to the party.

Bohdan Boiko, then deputy leader of the party and head of the party's Secretariat, did not support Vyacheslav Chornovil at that time. Later on, he became a deputy to Yuri Kostenko and a member of the Central Board of Kostenko's Rukh. For a relatively long time he remained with the new Rukh and, commenting on caused for the party's split-up, argued that "the split-up in the Rukh was planned by former KGB agents [who are] now people from the top leadership of the NRU" (Vechirniy Kyiv, July 13, 1999). Yet, his assessment of his own role in that mixed game.

Later on, in December 1999, after the presidential race was over, some sources hinted that "Bohdan Boiko, apparently, looks for ways to return to the Udovenko Rukh" (Zerkalo Nedeli, December 11, 1999). Hence, unity of the Kostenko party camp became to display cracks. A few days before the party congress the Ternopil regional organization of the Rukh (Kostenko) issued a statement describing the decision to hold the new party's foundation congress as "ill-thought" and potentially leading to "legal endorsement of the break-up of the party" (Vysokyi Zamok, December 15, 1999). Bohdan Boiko openly called for negotiations with the other part of the Rukh (Udovenko) and merge the two parts. The events developed at a high pace. On December 15, 1999, Hennady Udovenko and leader of the Rukh (Kostenko) faction in the parliament gave a joint press conference to announce that some of the members of the Kostenko faction had decided to join the Udovenko organization in a single faction of the NRU. Bohdan Boiko gave his reason for the initiative: "unwillingness to join the "new" Rukh whose foundation congress was about to take place" (Kievskie Vedomosti, December 17, 1999). A group of members of the Kostenko faction, led by Bohdan Boiko, signed a joint statement, which, as the Rukh's newspaper, the Chas, put it, "became a decisive stage on the way towards restoration of unity of the Rukh". The statement solemnly announced "our readiness for reconciliation and consolidation into the single faction of the People's Rukh in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine as the first step towards the unity in the party" (Chas, December 17, 1999). The statement was signed by Bohdan Boiko, Ivan Boichuk, Hryhory Manchulenko, Georgy Filipchuk, Yaroslav Dzhodzhuk, and Igor Tarasiuk. The politicians announced they made the step "consciously, in order not allow deeper break-up of the democratic forces and to restore the single influential and strong People's Rukh of Ukraine" (Chas, December 17, 1999). Sitting next to Hennady Udovenko, Bohdan Boiko pathetically announced that he had "joined the People's Rukh of Ukraine, and saw political prospects for that party only, but not for the new formations that would exploit the Rukh's slogans and symbols" (Chas, December 17, 1999). Commenting on the organizational and legal provisions for the would-be UNR, Boiko argued: "Establishment of yet another part of the right-[wing] kind is the legal proof of the break-up in the environment of the right forces" (Ukraina Moloda, December 18, 1999). Using this reasoning, should the recent establishment of the new "Rukh" be viewed as yet another proof of the fact? The issue is far from being a merely rhetoric one.

The main characters of the performance, the UNR and the NRU for which the unification action was reportedly organized, reacted to the establishment and ambitious declarations of the "third Rukh" with substantial degree of caution and ambivalence. In a sense, the process of consolidation at the right side of the Ukrainian political spectrum has been differentiated from the new initiative under the Rukh brand name. Representatives of the UNR and the NRU differ in their perspectives on the party "For Unity of the Rukh". The unification process was praised at the new Rukh's congress by deputy chairmen of the Rukh (Udovenko) Vyacheslav Koval and Lilia Hryhorovych, claiming they were positive that "in the future, the NRU and the association "For the Unified Rukh" will meet at a unification congress" (Holos Ukrainy, November 28, 2000). However, agreement between the two "old" Rukh is needed for such a congress to take place.

NRU leader Hennady Udovenko was rather cautious and diplomatic in his assessment of the event, saying that "we, on the one hand, were worried by the information about the establishment of the new party. But on the other, the establishment of that party indicates that the people are worried about the break-up that occurred in the People's Rukh of Ukraine. The newly-established party strives to unite the two Rukhs. We will support it in that, if that is really so, if there are no other motivations. My meetings with Bohdan Boiko - as he is a member of our faction - prove that he really seeks to unite the two Rukhs (Ukraina Moloda, November 30, 2000).

Leader of the UNR Yuri Kostenko seemed more open and skeptical - probably given his previous experience of dealing with Bohdan Boiko: "from the perspective of the idea that was used for the speculations during that congress - that the party was being formed in order to unite the two Rukhs - that did not look logical... I think that everything is being done for the sole purpose: to simplify

manipulation when it comes to real formation of election blocks" (Ukraina Moloda, November 30, 2000).

The story has yet another dimension. According to the theory of Ukrainian party building, any partisan entity is formed with the involvement of certain political and/or economic interest groups. Commenting on the possibility of applying the "oligarchy theorem" to the new "Rukh", Hennady Udovenko admitted: "I have no doubt that the oligarchic forces are interested in winning the Rukh's electorate, for our electorate is rather steady, independent on political change. Therefore, struggle for our electorate will intensify as the parliamentary election period comes closer. As far as the forces that may be behind Boiko and support him, I know nothing about that" (Ukraina Moloda, November 30, 2000). His opponent, leader of the UNR Yuri Kostenko made his point far more clear: "speaking about the financial part, I know that the money was given by the structures that you defined as oligarchic" (Ukraina Moloda, November 30, 2000).

Hence, while the NRU (Udovenko) was busy forming a political alliance with the Reforms and Order and the CUN, and while the UNR (Kostenko) was building a block with the Batkivshchyna, the third, different Rukh segment emerged in the political market, and was immediately described by one of key actors of the potential consolidation in rather negative terms. The UNR representative Yevhen Zhovtyak, MP, put it bluntly that "probably, certain analytical centers have calculated that both of the two Rukhs have a chance to make it to the parliament; that is why the creation of the third one was initiated in order to make sure that none of the three makes it" (Holos Ukrainy, November 28, 2000). The comments clearly indicate the relapse of division and rivalry as a chronic plague of the Ukrainian right-wing political forces, clearly demonstrated during the 1998 parliamentary election. While the NRU (Udovenko) publicly demonstrates benevolence to the new "Rukh", the attitude may not necessarily be shared by its newly-acquired partners, the Reforms and Order and the CUN. During the 1998 election campaign Bohdan Boiko repeatedly "called on the Rukh members to have no illusions about right extremist organizations like the National Front that have unleashed a slander campaign against Rukh in the Galychyna" (Chas/Time, November 30, 1997). The National Front's steering force was the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists, currently a partner of the NRU. Though the Rukh's new partners made no public comments about the future of their alliance in the new circumstances, but the establishment of the new political party may hinder the reconciliation process and building a constructive dialogue between the Ukrainian right-wing forces.